THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) No special drives are conducted by the Armed Forces for the recruitment of any particular caste. Hence, no special drive for recruitment of Kashmiri Pandit youth is planned.

(b) Does not arise.

Indo-China joint military exercise

1567. SHRI RUMANDLA RAAMACHANDRAYYA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India and China propose to hold joint military exercises as is being done with the United States; and

(b) by when a final decision is likely to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) India and China participated in a naval exercise on Search and Rescue (SAR) off Shanghai on November 14, 2003. The exercise was at a basic level. No other proposal for any further exercises between the Armed Forces of India and China is under consideration of the Government at present.

(b) In view of answer to part (a) above, question does not arise.

Purchase of Laser Guidance Kits/Penetration Bombs

1568. SHRI MURLI DEORA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether C&AG in his Report No. 7 of 2003 observed that the Ministry made purchases of laser guidance kits to penetration bombs at a higher price than the settled one;

(b) if so, the details and reasons therefor;

(c) the additional expenditure incurred as a result thereof;

(d) whether due to mismatch between the kits and the bombs, the shelf life of the kits was reduced; and

(e) if so, the reasons for going on emergency purchases and action taken on the report?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) No, Sir. C and AG observed that the cost of procurement of Laser Guidance Kits in 1999 was higher as compared to figures arrived at by escalating the last purchase price using normal escalation factors.

(b) A contract was concluded with a foreign vendor in August, 1999 for supply of Laser Guidance Kits (LGK) to fill up War Wastage Reserve (WWR) deficiencies as per approved scales and the prescribed procedure. The cost was higher because the proposal entailed supply of additional items, which were not separately priced in the contract, as well as a faster delivery schedule, etc.

(c) Question does not arise in view of (b) above.

(d) These LG kits were procured for General Purpose 1000 lbs Bombs. However, since these kits can be fitted to PB-500 Deep Penetration Bombs also, it was subsequently decided to procure these Deep Penetration Bombs too. Since bombs complementary to the LGKs were always available, question of reduction of shelf life to these kits due to mismatch with bombs does not arise.

(e) The urgency of procurement of LGK was based on the requirement to fill up the then existing deficiency in the War Wastage Reserve. Appropriate action has been taken on the report and comments have been sent to the Office of Principal Director of Audit Defence Services (Air Force and Navy).

Utilising private airlines for ferrying troops and materials

1569. PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Jet Airlines has been chartered by the Army to ferry troops and materials from sensitive locations in Ladakh;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government propose to utilise the services of private airlines for similar situation in difficult terrains; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?